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## **“An Equivocal Couple Overwhelmed by Life”:**

### **A Phenomenological Analysis of Pregnancy**

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Two conceptions of human generativity prevail in contemporary feminist philosophy. First, several contributors argue that the experience of pregnancy, when analyzed by phenomenological tools, undermines several distinctions that are central to western philosophy, most importantly the subject-object distinction and the self-other and own-alien distinctions. This line of argument was already outlined by Iris Marion Young in her influential essay “Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation” (1984). The other dominant argument is related to the first one, and it states that organic birth is the event that establishes the first experiential separation *between* the self and the other. On this understanding the mother-fetus relation would not involve any relations between two corporeal selves; all such relations would be postnatal. This notion has been defended, for example, by Christine Schües (1997, 2000) and Johanna Oksala (2003).<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, classical phenomenology is dominated by the idea that the rigorous first person methodology that is essential to phenomenology dictates that the sense of birth must be studied primarily by the reflection on the structures of our own recollection or memory. Consequently, the primary sense of human birth would be that of an *unattainable limit*. This is argued on the basis of the existential fact that we all are born but cannot recall

our own birth or else on the basis of the transcendental fact that the structure of retention ties each living present to an earlier one and implies that the transcendental ego cannot be subject to generation.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, all analyses and reflections of the experiences of labor, gestation, and pregnancy would be secondary since the sense of birth that these experiences involve is the nativity of another human being and not the nativity of the reflecting self.

This paper challenges both the feminist and the classical phenomenological approach. I maintain that careful phenomenological analyses of the experience of pregnancy undermines both notions. Such analyses show, on the one hand, that pregnancy does not imply a non-distinction or self-other fusion but on the contrary involves a specific self-other divide. At the same time, they demonstrate that the sense of birth is more complex than the classical recollection-paradigm suggests and that it includes more components than the signification of an unattainable limit. A proper phenomenology of birth must take into account, not only the universal fact that we all are born, but also the equally universal fact that each of us is born from another human being, that is, some other human subject.<sup>3</sup> This other human being who ‘gave’ us birth or ‘from who’s flesh we were born’ provides us with a unique perspective on our own past, beyond the limits of our own recollection. Her perspective is incomparable to any other external perspective; rather than simply giving us an additional third person viewpoint on our own organic birth, this one person is able to open a second person perspective on our pre- and postnatal life and the transition between them – all of which is beyond our own recollection.

My argument proceeds by the following steps:

First, I develop a fresh discourse on the experience of pregnancy, by studying a set of remarks to be found in Julia Kristeva’s post-phenomenological discourse on maternity, on the one hand, and in Simone de Beauvoir’s existential-phenomenological discourse on feminine

embodiment, on the other hand. I use these remarks as leading clues for a novel phenomenological study of the experience of pregnancy.<sup>4</sup> Contra Young's influential account mentioned above, I argue that gestation, as experienced by women who live it in the first person, includes a separation between two sensory-motor beings in a nesting relation: the pregnant self and the embryonic other. The alternative account that I provide hinges on my analysis of the experience of fetal movements and the role of touch-sensations and kinesthetic sensations in such experiences. Ultimately, I argue that pregnancy does not erode the self-other boundary or the own-alien boundary but re-establishes both divisions.

Second, I compare my account of the experience of pregnancy to Merleau-Ponty's discourse on the sensing-perceiving body and its sense-organs. The point of this comparison is to identify, by contrast to sense organs, the specific vital functions and goals (*telê*) of the feminine lived body in general and the maternal body in particular.<sup>5</sup> This second step comes late in the paper (only in the third section), but it is crucial since it allows me to clarify the unique role of pregnant embodiment in the establishment of a relationship of proto-communication between two subjects that are not equal in their powers, capacities or positions but despite of their asymmetry form a couple of mutually dependent subjects.

Together these two steps make up the main argument of the paper. The claim is that a primitive self-other relation of mutual awareness and reciprocal gesturing is established prior to the birth of the infant and that the newborn baby is not an egoless *tabula rasa* for us but has a sensory-motor identity and a potential for communication. Thus, the analysis of pregnancy is relevant to the philosophical discussion of the foundations of intersubjectivity and *Mitsein* or co-existence.

By implication, I also want to suggest that the core sense of human birth is not captured by the idea of an unattainable limit, parallel or opposite to the limit of death, as is

argued or assumed by many phenomenologists.<sup>6</sup> Neither should human birth be equated with our entry into discursive space as others have proposed.<sup>7</sup> The limit sense of birth is indeed discovered when we proceed by self-reflective investigations into the structures of recollection; and the entry to discursive space is crucial when we study human practices and political agency. However, the sense of birth as an event or advent is not bound to the third person perspective of onlookers but has an independent foundation in the *dual* relation between the birthing and the birthed. This final claim is not argued or discussed in what follows, but my analysis here serves to prepare the ground for such an argument. By instituting a different type of reflection on personal finitude, one which proceeds in first person but depends on empathetic and communicative interchanges with gestating women and on imaginative (not recollective) activities, I thus ultimately want to suggest that our birth is not merely, and perhaps not even primarily, an unattainable limit to us, parallel or opposite to death, nor our entry into discourse or logos. Rather, our birth is a specific type of lived bodily process that is evidenced to us by one single person – our mother – who serves paradoxically as its location, its witness, and its executor (agent).

### **A “Split Self”**

Many contemporary feminist phenomenologists argue that the experience of pregnancy challenges the notion that all human experience involves the distinction between selfhood and otherness, ownness and alienness. The argument is that in pregnancy the structures of selfhood and mineness are shaken and the distinction between what is one’s own and what is alien is undermined. Further, it is argued that this shows that the self-other and own-alien distinctions are not grounded in analyses of human experience but result from the conceptual tradition of an androcentric and egocentric philosophy. Iris Marion Young’s well-known

paper “Pregnant Embodiment” serves as an illuminative example of this line of argumentation:

Reflection on the experience of pregnancy reveals a body subjectivity that is decentered, myself in the mode of not being myself . . . The first movements of the fetus produce the sense of the splitting subject; the fetus’s movements are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space. Only I have access to these movements from their origin, as it were (Young [1984] 1990, 162-163).

In contemporary debates (e.g. Young [1984] 1990; Diprose 2002; Guenther 2006; and Gray 2008), the Youngian argument is usually traced to Simone de Beauvoir’s existential-phenomenological descriptions of feminine embodiment, on the one hand, and to the philosophical discourses on maternity provided by Beauvoir’s Lacanian successors, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, on the other hand.

However, if we study the original formulations of these feminist classics in detail, we find slightly contrastive formulations. In Kristeva’s “Stabat Mater” (1983), for example, we read the following:

The immeasurable, unconfined maternal body. | First there is the separation, previous to pregnancy, but which pregnancy brings to light and imposes without remedy. | On the one hand the pelvis; centre of gravity, unchanging ground, heaviness and weight to which the things adhere, with no promise of agility on that score. On the other hand – the torso, arms, neck, head, face, calves, feet: unbounded liveliness, rhythm and mask, which furiously attempt to compensate for the immutability of the central tree. We live on that border, crossroads beings, crucified beings. . . . A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. . . . |

Then there is this other abyss that opens up between the body and what had been its inside: there is the abyss between the mother and the child. What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which, once the umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other? My body and . . . him. No connection (Kristeva [1983] 1995, 177-179).

Rather than describing an experience of indistinction or fusion, Kristeva's essay outlines a special type of separation or self-estrangement in which the experiential spatial structures of one's own body are divided on multiple axes.

First, the experience of the solidity and movability of one's own body is drastically changed. Instead of appearing in its habitual form of a relatively unified chunk-like or block-like structure, the lived body now presents itself as divided into two interrelated sensory-motor systems: on the one hand, my lively and freely moving limbs – i.e. my arms, my hands, my legs, my feet, and my head – and on the other hand, the center of my body that now presents itself as stable, sluggish or slow. So the lived body is, as if, reorganized and divided into two subsystems on the basis of the movability of its parts, and it forms a sphere-like structure in which the limbs move freely around a relatively stable center. Cosmological and vegetable metaphors come easily to mind. The torso of the pregnant mother seems immovable in comparison to her vivacious limbs, and to its former energetic state, suggesting the image of a bole surrounded by twitching branches or a star with revolving planets.<sup>8</sup> The duality in movement is not just an external appearance but part of the sensory-motor experience of being pregnant.

However, this duality should not be characterized as a “split” (cf. Young [1984] 1990, 162), since the central cogito “I can move” that constitutes the lived body still traverses freely across the visual-tactile body, between hands, fingers, legs, feet, the torso, and the expressive

organs of the face. This means that the pregnant body is not divided by the distinction between “I can” and “I cannot.” Rather, its regions are delineated by the different modalities of moving: light/heavy, stiff/slack, and loose/tight. In other words, the movement is characterized by a new non-habitual type of resistance (cf. Jacobs 2012).

Second, in its later stages, pregnancy also involves another kind of division.<sup>9</sup> The body that thus far has appeared as solid or substantial now discloses an inner space. The intrauterine movements of the fetus, as sensed and perceived by the pregnant mother, co-constitute with her double-sensations a lived interior within the contours of her body.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, also the habitual sensations of her body disclose, in their daily and monthly circles, a set of inner processes, related to the functions of breathing, eating, digesting, sleeping, and menstruating. But the new sensations that appear with advanced pregnancy differ from the habitual ones by their rhythmic structures and alternating character. Moreover, their temporal gestalt resembles the gestalt of the movements characteristic of living beings visible and tangible in the outer environment. Thus, these sensations are able to motivate an apperceptive experience of the presence of another living being moving inside one’s own living body (cf. Husserl [1950] 1960, 109-111; Heinämaa 2014a).

Furthermore, the fetal other that freely moves inside the mother’s body reacts to touch. When the mother feels the fetus “accidentally” pressing its body on the inner contours of her womb and when she sees the effects of these inner movements on the surface of her belly, she can freely touch her own belly with her hands, press her fingers on the skin, and feel the movements of the fetus also in her fingers.<sup>11</sup> These sensations of touching are mediated by the mother’s flesh.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, she can respond to the sensed and perceived movements by moving her hands on the skin of her belly. The fetus may react to such motivation – “stimulus” or “address” – in different ways, e.g. by changing place or by

twisting. Other persons too can touch the fetus by touching the mother's body. Their touchings are also mediated by the mother's flesh, but the difference is that in this case the mother only experiences the sensations of being touched by the third person and not the double-sensation of touching herself. In other words, the double sensation of touching/being touched is lacking.<sup>13</sup>

These lived bodily changes and the related modes of self-estrangement should not be associated or equated with the hypothetical state of loss of all egoic structures or with pathological self-disorders manifest, for example, in schizophrenia.<sup>14</sup> Instead of signaling a state of egoless indistinction or diminished (or intensified) selfhood, the changes characteristic of pregnancy mean that the gestating woman is separating or divorcing from her earlier form of embodiment and at the same time establishing new boundaries for her own body. Rather than being characterized by loss of selfhood, pregnancy must be understood as a form of self-transformation.

Accordingly, the condition of the pregnant woman is not abnormal in any simple sense. To be sure, her new bodily experiences and her new experiences of her own body divert from her prior experiences as well as from the common standards of normality, but on the other hand her pregnant body also presents itself as an optimization of certain functions that belong to her vital and affective life.<sup>15</sup> These functions have been part of her bodily life since her first menstruation and have recurred since then with periodic rhythms. Each month contains the possibility of bodily transformation, and the state of pregnancy is the actualization of this reappearing possibility. Thus, her pregnant body diverts from her habitual personal norms of embodiment<sup>16</sup> as well as from the common norms of human embodiment, but at the same time it establishes another standard, diverting from the habitual-personal and the common.



## Pregnant Embodiment Reconsidered

It is important to note that Young's formulations differ drastically from those of Kristeva.

Young uses Kristeva's metaphors but the state of fusion that she depicts is very different from the structure that we find described in Kristeva's early essay.

We saw above that the feminine bodily subject, as delineated by Kristeva, is indeed extraordinary, but instead of losing all boundaries of selfhood or oneness this subject experiences a set of new boundaries that differ from the ones that were established in her life prior to pregnancy. Thus the process undermines, not all sense of selfhood, but the structures that have governed her sensory-motor life prior to the first indications of this particular other that now grows inside her body.<sup>17</sup>

Young, on the other hand, argues that the pregnant mother cannot make any distinction between herself and the other, between what is her own and what belongs to the infant. This fusion, she claims, concerns both kinesthetic sensations of movement and the possession of body parts and bodily spaces. To see this concretely, let us study again the paragraph already quoted above:

The pregnant subject . . . *experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements* belong to another being, yet they *are not other* . . . This split subject appears in the eroticism of pregnancy, in which the woman can experience an innocent narcissism fed by recollection of her repressed experience of her own mother's body. . . . The first movements of the fetus produce the sense of the splitting subject; the *fetus's movements are wholly mine*, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space. *Only I have access to these movements from their origin*, as it were (Young [1984] 1990, 160-162, emphasis mine).

On the basis of this analysis, Young argues that the mother's experience of the fetus moving inside her body can be compared to her experience of her own dreams and thoughts. She contends: "I have a privileged relation to this other life not unlike that [relation] which I have to my dreams and thoughts which I can tell someone but which cannot be an object for both of us" (Young [1984] 1990, 163). The epistemological concept of *privileged access* is thus imposed by Young on the description of experience. This concept does not belong to the phenomenological approach but stems from another philosophical tradition, from the pragmatist and Rylean critiques of Cartesianism (see e.g., Peirce 1868; Ryle 1949).<sup>18</sup> The main goal of the phenomenology of embodiment, as outlined by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and their feminist successors, is to *radicalize* René Descartes' philosophical method, not to criticize his philosophy on the basis of its theoretical impasses (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995; Heinämaa 2004; and Heinämaa 2005). This radicalization demands that the question concerning the self-other relation is not formulated by the epistemological concept of *access* but by the phenomenological concept of *empathy*, more precisely by the concepts of empathic apperception and empathic derepresentation (Husserl [1950] 1960; Husserl [1952] 1993, 198; Husserl [1962] 1988; and Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995).<sup>19</sup> We do not ask how we know that the other has a mind nor do we inquire into the contents of the other's mind or into the access that we have (or do not have) to his or her "inner feelings" or "inner thoughts." Instead, we ask *how* we experience the other; under what conditions and by what means he or she appears to us (Husserl [1950] 1960; Husserl [1952] 1993; and Heinämaa 2014a).

The classical phenomenological answer to this latter question – the question concerning conditions of experiencing – is that we experience the other as such on the basis of perceived movements of a body and the empathic experiential relation that we can establish to such movements on the basis of our own double-sensations and kinesthesia

(Heinämaa 2007; Heinämaa 2010b).

In addition to the problems caused by the epistemological concept of privileged access, Young's description of the experience of pregnancy is strained by the ambiguity of her concepts of selfhood and ownness. As we saw above, she argues that the pregnant woman "experiences her body as *herself and not herself*," and that pregnancy thus "reveals a body subjectivity that is . . . *myself in the mode of not being myself*" (emphasis mine). Moreover, Young claims that the fetus' movements "are wholly mine," that is, that these movements belong to the pregnant mother rather than the fetus inside her.

In the phenomenological articulation, "mineness" and "ownness" refer back to the ego of the cogito "I experience..." (Husserl [1950] 1960; Husserl [1952] 1993; and Zahavi 1999). So whatever is lively experienced or lived by me in the first person belongs to me and is mine, and whatever lacks this determination falls outside the field of my possessions.<sup>20</sup>

This means that my lived bodily possessions include all the organs immediately involved in my perceptions, movements, sensations, and feelings and the whole body composed of such organs (Husserl [1952] 1993, 145-146, 217-218, 260-262; and Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995, 91-93. Cf. Bernet et al. [1989] 1993, 131-139; Zahavi 1999; Al-Saji 2010; and Sheet-Johnston 2006). The movements of "my" body are mine in this pregnant sense, and belong to me, insofar as they are given to me by touch-sensations and kinesthetic sensations. For example, an organic arm cut off from a human corpse may be attached to my body, it may even have vascular and neural connections to my organs and it may move and be movable by me,<sup>21</sup> but if I lack all touch sensations or all kinesthetic sensations in it, then this hand-shaped entity, despite its nearness to me, despite the vascular-neural connections, and despite its movements, is not part of my moving living body. Rather, it is comparable to the tools that I use in monitoring space, e.g. eyeglasses, binoculars, satellites, and submarine

robots, or to the white cane that assists visually impaired and blind people (cf. Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995, 143).

The correct description of pregnancy<sup>22</sup> should not include oxymoronic or contradictory formulations, e.g. “self and not self,” but should capture a particular temporal process of bodily transformation and re-formation.<sup>23</sup> The experience of pregnancy changes the contours and the boundaries of the lived body but it does not disrupt the grounds of ownness or mineness. The torso that thus far has presented itself as a unified and closed structure and as a center of movement and balance now contains an inner space generous enough to allow free movement and to host an other living being.

This “generosity” involves both volume and medium. In other words, the given space has to be suitable for movements in two respects. First, it has to be large and flexible enough to provide an environment for movement, and second, it also has to be filled with a medium that sustains the movements. One’s own body is thus constituted in pregnancy not merely as a zero point of orientation and as a means of action, but also as a container or an envelope with an alien inhabitant.<sup>24</sup> The contained other is alien in the sense that its movements are not mine, since they are given to me merely by touch sensations and not by kinesthetic sensations. However, they strangely appear within the space of my own body, that is, within the contours of my skin that usually exclude all alien movements, in my flesh that typically appears as a fullness, and inside the torso that thus far has operated merely as the center of locomotion.

### **The Teleological Sense of Being Pregnant**

Kristeva’s analysis of a doubly divided subject refers back to Simone de Beauvoir’s discourse on feminine experience as developed in *The Second Sex*. In the chapter “The Mother,”

located in *Part V Situation of The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes:

A new existent is going to manifest and justify itself, and she is proud of it. But she also feels herself moved by obscure forces, tossed and violated. What is specific to the pregnant woman is that the body is experienced as immanent at the moment when it transcends itself. . . . The transcendence of the artisan, of the man of action is inhabited by one subjectivity, but in the becoming mother the opposition between subject and object is abolished. She forms with this child from which she is swollen an equivocal couple overwhelmed by life. (Beauvoir [1949] 1987, 512, translation modified)

Here, Beauvoir argues that the feminine-maternal experience of one's own body differs in crucial respects from the masculine experience that operates as the norm in philosophical and human scientific and life scientific discourses (cf. Heinämaa 2003, 72-75; Heinämaa 2012a). The first and most important of these differences concerns the character of self-transcendence. Beauvoir argues that in pregnancy, the woman does not transcend herself, her habits, goals, and projects, by voluntary bodily movements and deliberate actions only; rather, her self-transcending involves another being growing inside her body and growing from her body.<sup>25</sup>

Second, this nesting relation undermines the traditional opposition, polarity or clash between two subjects. This should not be taken to mean that pregnancy would cancel the distinction between the self and the other, as Young's analysis suggests. Instead, Beauvoir argues that what is challenged is the symmetrical Hegelian-Sartrean model that locks the self and the other into a conflictual relationship in which both must fight to death for recognition. The experience of pregnancy questions the adequacy of this model in so far as it involves two sensory-motor selves in a relationship that is neither conflictual nor mutually validating.

Instead of a symmetrical pair, the two selves connected in pregnancy form a couple that is characterized by non-symmetrical co-dependency and one-directional bounteousness.

In order to better understand Beauvoir's conceptualization of the mother-fetus pair as "an equivocal couple," we must study the argumentative context in which this idea is presented.

Beauvoir's remark is put forward as a direct comment on Merleau-Ponty's influential thesis on human embodiment, formulated in *Phenomenology of Perception* as follows: "I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my total being" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995, 198. Cf. Beauvoir [1949] 1987, 61).

One of Merleau-Ponty's main ideas in the *Phenomenology* is that the anonymous, non-personal functions of our sense-organs provide a sketch for our worldly relations. He argues that our egoic acts forge personal ways of intending out of this general intentional "material." This means that our conscious lives can be characterized as interpretations or modifications of a general human way or human style of relating to the world (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995, 124-126).

Beauvoir's description of feminine embodiment complicates this line of thought. Her main idea is that the human body, as it is given to women, is not just a general sketch that serves her personal development but it is also a concrete point of contact between two separate selves. In addition to the anonymous operations of the sense-organs which serve our personal acts of experiencing, a woman's lived body entails functions which contribute to the emergence and sustenance of another sensing being, and potentially another person. This means that the operations of the human body do not just incorporate general world-relations with personal intendings, or past activities with futural spontaneity, as Merleau-Ponty argues

(Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995, 240, 441-442), but that some of them also serve the establishment of the division between two sensory-motor subjects, one nested inside the other.

The functions of pregnant and nursing bodies resemble the anonymous operations of our perceptual organs in providing a foundation for certain kinds of experiences. Whereas the anonymous functions of our sense-organs contribute to the personal relations of attentive perception, the vital functions of the maternal body contribute to the establishment of interpersonal relations of affection and proto-communication between two subjects, the fetus and the mother, one of which is nested inside the other. Such experiences become possible when the fetus reaches the level of articulate sensation and autonomous movement.

There is one important aspect in which the feminine body functions differ both from the operations of our sense-organs and from the functions of the our viscera: All these three types of pre-personal functions come to the fore in discomfort and pain, but whereas pain indicates damage or illness in the case of the sense-organs and the viscera, it lacks this meaning in the case of these feminine functions.<sup>26</sup> Menstruation, lactation, swelling of breasts, and expansion of the belly involve discomfort and pain but, as argued above, they are not grasped as signals of an abnormal or anomalous condition that diverts from the optimal state of the feminine body.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, they contribute to the establishment of another norm. To be sure, such occurrences and developments divert from the daily processes of women's bodies, but at the same time they constitute a somatic norm that covers these bodies from sexual maturity to menopause.

The most apparent difference, however, between the vital functions of the feminine body, on the one hand, and the functions of our sense-organs and our viscera, on the other hand, is in their teleologies. The functions of the feminine body point to and make possible a

reorganization of one's own body: pregnancy involves an experience of bodily self-estrangement, and the ordinary vital functions of the feminine body prepare for this condition. In pregnancy, the bodily inside is not anymore an indefinite mass but appears as a volume and a habitat of another living-moving being.

This teleology is not just a medical fact or a theological dogma, but is part of the bodily experience of women themselves. The main point is captured well by Kristeva, who in "Stabat Mater" states that a woman with a child is "a division of the very flesh" (Kristeva 1983, 240-241).

The functions of the feminine body, as it is lived by women, are specific in that they prepare for an opening of an inner space, a space that houses another living sensing-moving being. The two – the inner space and its fetal inhabitant – are constituted together for the pregnant woman, and the constitution involves several different types of sensations and a complex nexus of them.

### **Concluding Remarks on the Relation between the Pre-Personal and the Personal**

The teleological character of the feminine functions does not imply that pregnancy or labor would be natural goals for all women. These functions are pre-personal in the same sense as the functions of our sense organs are: they provide a platform for our personal goals and projects but do not determine or predetermine them. To argue that the teleology of the feminine functions would determine a set of natural goals for all women would be similar to arguing that the teleology of our eyes determine what we can and must see or that the teleology of the male genitals determines what each male person does or leaves undone.

We have seen, however, that the feminine functions differ from all other vital functions of our human bodies in that their telos involves another living sensing-moving



being. This means that the personal decisions of individual women made in respect to these functions, and the personal goals that they set, concern co-existence and its conditions of development. This topic does not compromise the fact that these decisions are personal and belong to women as unique subjects and autonomous agents.

What my analysis of the experience of pregnancy teaches us is that *Mitsein* is not a goal for us as separate individuals but is an original structure of human existence. This gives us a very different set of ethical and political tasks than the Hobbesian and Hegelian models in which co-existence is a difficult achievement based on contracts, oppositions, and conflicts.

By implication, my analysis also suggest that a contemporary phenomenology of birth should not proceed exclusively by self-reflective investigations into the limits of memory or recollection but should also inquire, empathetically and imaginatively, into the communicative couple of the fetus and the pregnant mother. If what I have argued holds, then our birth is not merely an unattainable limit of experiencing, parallel to death, but is also a process presented to us by a single person who paradoxically serves as its executor, witness, and location and who can communicate this phenomenon to us in so far as she is both birthing and remembering-speaking.

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<sup>1</sup> The core of this line of argument is captured well by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Eye and Mind* (1961) where he writes: “It can be said that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible, inside the mother’s body, becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 167-168). Merleau-Ponty’s own view of birth is however more complex than this common notion, and it is based on his analysis on which touching involves relations of reflexivity and interval analogous to those of seeing. In the same work, he argues: “There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and touched, between one eye and an other, between hand and hand, blending or crossover takes place, *when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible*” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 163-164, italics mine, translation modified).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Husserl's clarification in the second volume of *Ideas*: "If there were a sense to saying that this [pure] ego is subject to generation and perishing, then we would precisely have to establish this possibility in pure givenness; we would have to be able to grasp in pure intuition, the essential possibility of generation and perishing. But as soon as we set out to do so, the absurdity of it becomes plain. The pure ego itself of such intuition, namely the regarding . . . ego, would be living in the continuity of this regarding as what is identical in the corresponding duration, and yet it would have to find at once, precisely in this duration, a time-span in which it itself was not and a beginning point in which it first of all entered into being. We would have the absurdity that the absolutely existing ego, in the duration of its being, would encounter itself as not being" (Husserl [1952] 1993, 110. Cf. Steinbock 1995; Heinämaa 2010e).

<sup>3</sup> The analogy to death proves limited in this point: whereas I am born from another human being, I do not pass into another human being or into a flesh of another living being when I die, even if death traditionally is conceptualized in many cultures by the metaphors of return, e.g., return to the earth-mother.

<sup>4</sup> On the phenomenological starting points of Kristeva's inquiries into subjectivity, see Heinämaa 2010c.

<sup>5</sup> I use here both “lived body” and “living body” interchangeably for Husserl’s concept of *Leib* (translated as “animate organism” by Cairns, and as “Body,” with capital B, by Rojcewicz and Schuwer). I choose to do so in order to keep in mind the essentially double character of the body as an operating subject and an object operated on, accentuated by the phenomenon of double sensation. Most importantly the lived body is contrasted to the body as an object of natural-scientific theoretization and naturalistic philosophy. For an explication of these concepts and their differences, see Dodd 1997; Heinämaa 2003; Heinämaa 2010b; and Jacobs 2014.

<sup>6</sup> For such arguments, see Heinämaa 2010a.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Schües 1997, 2000; Oksala 2003. Cf. Heinämaa 2010d.

<sup>8</sup> For literary, erotic and moral-theoretical aspects of such metaphors, see Heinämaa 2006 and Zamir 2011.

<sup>9</sup> The experience of pregnancy typically proceeds and evolves in stages that are both continuous and distinct.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl himself argues that the fetus is a “limit creature” or, more precisely, that there is a limit to the empathetic apperception by which we are able to experience the unborn child as a living being similar to ourselves (Husserl 1973, 171, 173). My argument is that this experience of limit is motivated differently, by different types of sensory-motor experiences, for the pregnant mother than for the other persons involved.

<sup>11</sup> For video recordings of such phenomena, see, for example, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZH\\_4j1\\_IM0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZH_4j1_IM0).

<sup>12</sup> The idea of flesh as a mediating element has important historical roots. In *De Anima (On the Soul)*, Aristotle argues (i) that each sense-perception involves an element that mediates in the process in which the perceiving soul is “informed” by the perceived thing; and (ii) that *flesh* is the bodily medium of touch-perception (1986, II: 11, 422b20-423b30, III: 13, 435a15-25). For a transcendental phenomenological reinterpretations of this idea, see chapter four, “The intertwining – the chiasm,” in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible (Le visible et l’invisible* 1964) and Irigaray’s essay “The invisible of the flesh” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference (Éthique de la différence sexuelle* 1984).

<sup>13</sup> For double-sensations and their role in the constitution of the lived body and its organs, see Husserl [1952] 1993, 152-158; Stein [1917] 1964, 41-48; and Heinämaa 2010b.

<sup>14</sup> For phenomenological analyses of schizophrenia and the related conditions of diminished self-affection and hyperreflexivity, see Sass 2001; Sass and Parnas 2001a, 2001b; Fuchs 2005; Sass and Parnas 2003; and Käll 2009. Cf. Ferri et al. 2012.

<sup>15</sup> On the phenomenological concepts of normality and abnormality operative here, see Heinämaa 2014b.

<sup>16</sup> On the concept of the habitual body or the habit-body, see Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1995, 142-147.

<sup>17</sup> The phenomenon is traditionally called “quickening,” a term derived from “quick” in the sense of *alive* (*vivus*, *bios*, *zoe*). The term has been used in this sense in medical and legal discourse since ancient times. In early modernity, quickening was usually taken as the first certain sign of new life and thus pregnancy. The mere absence of menstruation was not taken as a reliable sign of new life. Accordingly, women declared pregnancy only on the basis of experiences of fetal movements (Labouvie 1998, 19).

<sup>18</sup> The phenomenological concept of *first person givenness* must not be identified with the epistemological concept of *privileged access*. Whereas the former concept allows us to argue that the mental contents of other persons are given to us directly in their gestures and expressions, the latter concept suggests an exclusive picture in which we merely have access to our own mental states and must infer what the other person thinks or feels from his or her behavior. The concept of privileged access is usually associated with Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of the idea of a *private language*. See e.g., Rorty 1970; Gertler 2003.

<sup>19</sup> More precisely, the analytical tools of phenomenology include the concepts of pairing (*Paarung*), passive associative synthesis, movitation, lived bodiliness (*Leiblichkeit*) and double sensation (see, e.g., Husserl [1960] 1970; Husserl [1952] 1993).

<sup>20</sup> This does not imply that the ego would be the creator or producer of these experiences. Instead, the ego should be understood as the *dative* of experiencing, the one *to whom* things appear and are given.

<sup>21</sup> For a phenomenological discussion of such possibilities, see Slatman 2009; Slatman and Widdershoven 2009.

<sup>22</sup> I develop, and endorse, here the classical Husserlian understanding of phenomenology that does not just mean a description of the multiplicity of human experiences or human perspectives but means a rigorous descriptive-analytical science of experience aiming at illuminating the fundamental structures of all experiencing and the constitutive functions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. As such, phenomenology is a method and an inquiry with its own standards of correctness, validity, and truth. With this in mind, it is legitimate to speak of a correct description and understanding of the experience of pregnancy. For a clarification of the conceptual difference between phenomenology in Husserl's rigorous sense and phenomenology in a more loose sense (influenced by pragmatism and critical theory), see Heinämaa and Rodemeyer 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Pregnancy has also been conceptualized as the birth of the mother and as the rebirth of the pregnant woman as mother. For a discussion of the religious and Christian background of this idea, see Elvey 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Irigaray [1984] 1993, 83-94; Utriainen 1989 and 2006. The experiential fact that the pregnant body is given as capable of containing or enveloping another sensing moving subject does *not* imply that the pregnant woman would be a vessel (tool) that could freely be used by third parties (familial, medical or religious) for the promotion of their interests and goals. Nor does it imply any social, political, or religious notions of feminine embodiment. However, this experiential fact *helps to understand and to make sense* of the multiplicity of the different cultural notions and social practices related to pregnancy.



<sup>25</sup> Beauvoir famously describes this phenomenon in highly negative terms; she calls the fetus “a parasite” and “a burden.” Her point here is to capture the negative, pessimistic, and threatening aspects of the experience of pregnancy and the experiential fact that the flourishing of the mother and the well-being of the embryo are two separate functions that may conflict. Beauvoir argues that women tend to experience their pregnancies in negative terms if they are forced into pregnancy and denied of all means of controlling the reproductive functions of their bodies. This affective and emotional social experience finds pictorial representations in science fiction literature and movies, most dramatically perhaps in the *Alien* series. For a comprehensive typification of fictitious figures that occupy human bodies, see, <http://www.explore-science-fiction-movies.com/alien-species.html#axzz2KlocSH00>. For scholarly accounts of these popular representations, see e.g., Kuhn 1990.

<sup>26</sup> I use the term “feminine” as an attribute to the nouns “embodiment,” “body”, and “bodily function” to refer to women’s experiences of themselves as sensory motor, i.e. bodily, subjects. I have chosen this terminology to keep my discourse of embodiment separate from bioscientific, medical, and zoological sciences in which women’s bodies are studied as a female organism.

<sup>27</sup> This does not imply that the feminine condition involves more pains than the masculine condition or that pain belongs more intimately to the feminine body than to the masculine body. The relevant comparison here is not between the feminine condition and the masculine condition or between the feminine body and the masculine body but between different bodily organs and functions as they give themselves to feminine subjects.